

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Robin McCormick | rmccormick@hampton.gov | 757-728-3276
22 Lincoln Street | Hampton, VA 23669

Hampton selects police chief with experience in N.C. and Ga.

Sept. 11, 2013 - Terry Sult, 56, director of public safety in Sandy Springs, Ga., has been named Hampton's police chief after a national search that involved extensive public and community input.

"I believe that Chief Sult will be an open communicator - both within the police division and with the community," said City Manager Mary Bunting, noting that his experience includes 27 years in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, as well as being police chief in Gastonia, N.C., and Sandy Springs, Ga.

"I have found him to be - and his references confirm that he is - frank, fair, consistent, transparent and collaborative. Chief Sult's experience has demonstrated that he is genuinely committed to a true partnership with the community," Bunting said. The appointment is effective Oct. 7.

After 5 years in Sandy Spring, Sult said he was looking forward to leading the Hampton Police Division. "Hampton is a beautiful city with a strong history and a great future. The crime rate overall has been decreasing, and the force has an excellent record of solving crimes. Our foremost priority is to prevent crime. We will seek to better understand community concerns by strengthening community partnerships with a priority to stem the recent uptick in youth violence."

Sult notes that his police experience began when he was 14 as a police explorer in Mecklenburg County. He served as a patrol officer and homicide detective and coordinated Charlotte's first street-level drug unit. He has also served on and led task forces that collaborated with federal and state enforcement agencies on issues such as anti-terrorism and preparedness, and partnered with neighboring localities to create regional and consolidated special situation teams (such as SWAT and dive teams.)

Hampton's selection process was guided by the International City/County Management Association and a consultant with significant experience in public safety hiring. "We were very deliberate in this process because the Chief of Police is perhaps the most critical and important job a City Manager fills," said Bunting.

Community participants universally praised the process.

Linda Curtis, former Commonwealth's attorney, served on one of the selection panels and described the process as "brilliant" in the way it evaluated candidates. "This process brought together a very varied group of people - a cross-section that reflects Hampton - as well as police chiefs. There could be no fix."

The Rev. Anderson Clary Jr., pastor at Queen Street Baptist Church, noted, “I trust the process and I support the manager’s decision.” Added Fox Hill resident Teresa Vanasse Schmidt, “I am proud that such a diverse group in Hampton was part of a process that is so important to the health of our community.”

“Chief Sult performed well in aspects of the selection process, had impeccable references and - most importantly - has exhibited the qualities we value and most desired in all of his work to date,” said Bunting. “Specifically, Chief Sult’s approach to law enforcement is deeply rooted in community problem-oriented policing. I am convinced he will build on the traditions begun by former Chief Pat Minetti and re-emphasized most recently under Interim Chief (Tommy) Townsend’s leadership.”

Sult has a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from Gardner-Webb University and a master’s of business administration from Pfeiffer University. He also is a graduate of North Carolina State University’s Administrative Officers’ Management Program and Senior Management Institute of Policing through Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and the Police Executive Research Forum.

City Manager Mary Bunting said the city chose to do a much more extensive selection and vetting process than usual to ensure that the community would be involved in the process:

“First, we held meetings with community members to determine what this community at this time found to be the most important qualities and qualifications for the next police chief. We wanted those community priorities clearly reflected before we even posted the position. Those who participated included: neighborhood leaders; Hampton Watch and NAACP representatives; Citizen Engagement & Advisory Committee members; faith leaders; school/university representatives; law enforcement representatives from HU, TNCC and LAFB; Neighborhood Watch & Citizens Police Academy graduates; and business leaders. We also included groups of HPD employees and city department heads in that process. Finally, additional representatives from the faith community, business community and community sectors helped complete the candidate profile that would become the screening tool.”

“Candidates who strongly met the qualifications were moved forward to the next step: Panel interviews via phone. Community members made up more than half of that panel and were selected based on their involvement in neighborhood and crime issues, such as Neighborhood Commission and/or serving on the Community Plan Public Safety team. Assessments tallied such things as whether a candidate could demonstrate examples of certain skills; showed a prescribed level of management and command experience; and could describe related experience in certain areas. (To ensure consistency, one person was designated to ask the exact same set of pre-determined questions to all candidates.) The panel reached unanimous decisions on which applicants would move forward.”

“Next, those candidates met in person with three different panels that evaluated how the candidates responded to three different scenarios. Of the 12 interviewers, 3 were city department heads. Two were regional police chiefs (outside of Hampton). The majority were Hampton community leaders who brought broad experience to the panels: neighborhood leadership, civic engagement, civil rights leadership, Hampton University representation, criminal justice experience, faith leadership and business representation.”

“That group spent as much time in training as they did with the candidates. Written assessments were focused on measurable outcomes - whether a candidate mentioned a topic or program, for example, rather than subjective conclusions. Each panel assessed one scenario presented to all the candidates and then reached consensus on the performance for that exercise.”

###